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Iran's Position in Geopolitical Competition between China and India: Emphasizing the Role of Chabahar*

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Abstract

The geopolitical competition between India on one hand and the China-Pakistan axis, on the other hand, have made various researchers investigate the different, unknown, and influential aspects of this competition. One of the fields that can influence the analysis of these competitions is political geography. Therefore, in the present research, the researchers have tried to create a new point of view regarding Iran's position in the geopolitical competition between China and India by relying on the sources and analyses that have been done by Indian authors and researchers regarding the issue of China-India competition and also Iran's position in this competition. The authors of this research adopted a meta-analytic approach to drive conclusions from the collected data. Authentic documents in books, scientific-research articles, reliable internet websites and important international news agencies were analyzed to collect the relevant data. The findings suggest that regarding geopolitical access, both China and India are persistently seeking to facilitate their connection to Eurasia through Iran and Pakistan and thus increase their geopolitical weight to enjoy a better position in world politics in the 21st century.

Keywords: Chabahar, China, India, Geopolitical Competition, Iran, Kautilya

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1. Introduction

The issue of India's competition with China-Pakistan in South Asia and the expansion of such geopolitical conflicts and rivalries to other neighboring geographical areas is one of the issues that has attracted the attention of different researchers in various fields of study for several decades. Each of these researchers has tried to investigate this issue based on the theoretical and intellectual foundations of his/her field and, through a specific range of sources and scientific assumptions (Kong, 2021). One of the factors that has increased the various dimensions of India's competition with the China-Pakistan axis is the "geopolitics of access". The geopolitics of access can be considered as one of the foundations of geopolitical competitions, which in the contemporary period has not only increased the complexity of these competitions, but has also become one of the issues that have caused competition among different countries in the world (Goldthau, Keim, & Westphal, 2018, pp. 2-3) The geopolitics of access can be considered as one of the basic issues of the competition in the 21st century, in which the existing competitions between actors have a hybrid nature. In other words, the concept and the function of geoeconomy are as important as geopolitics itself. This hybrid nature can be especially seen in China's foreign policy, which is trying to gain a series of access networks to global resources and markets in the 21st century with the help of its maritime strategies, and as a result, increase the scope of its superiority over its global and regional competitors, the United States of America and India, respectively (An, Sharp, & Shaw, 2021). This issue is highly important in Iran, since Pakistan and Afghanistan are the two most important neighbors of Iran and the two countries, India and China, are also very important to Iran in terms of geopolitical and geoeconomic issues, which explains

the reason for which extensive research has been dedicated to this subject, as examining the issue of these competitions can provide a clear perspective into Iranian policy makers. Nevertheless, it seems that in the area of political geography and geopolitics, the perception of these competitions from the perspective of these countries, and the type of analysis provided by their experts have not been addressed, yet. Therefore, in the present research, an attempt has been made to focus on India, to address one of the most fundamental issues in the formation of India's attitude towards its neighbors, and to analyze the way in which India perceives the surrounding geographical space concerning its growing rivalry with the China-Pakistan axis.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Seas have long played an important role in India's economy. In addition, the sea ports of India have always been considered as the entrance gate of the internal territories of this country to the world markets and also as a means of communication with them. At the beginning of the new millennium, the Chabahar ocean port, due to its function in establishing fast connections with the peripheral regions of India, changed into a focal point in the geopolitical policies of this country. Furthermore, as an important means of advancing economic and regional policies of India in Asia, the Chabahar port has been at the center of the country's attention. The importance of this issue in the geopolitics of India and China will increase when we pay attention to the fact that in the east of Chabahar port, China is looking for the development of Gwadar port to advance its strategic goals in South and West Asia (Singh, 2016). In addition, it should not be forgotten that Iran's strategic

importance for India's energy security is inevitable, since Iran is the supplier of an important part of India's required oil and gas, and at the same time, due to its location in a special geographical position, it facilitates Indo-Eurasian communication. For this reason, it can be said that India's interest in investing in Chabahar ocean port is an important factor in India's foreign policy to reach the Eurasian regions (Roy, 2012, p. 960).

The Eurasia region plays an important role in India's geostrategic and geoeconomic approaches (Cohen, 2009, p. 140). However, as argued by Kaura (2015), it should not be forgotten that India's inclination towards having relations with Eurasia is facing an important geopolitical obstacle, that is, Pakistan. In other words, Pakistan, rather than being a facilitating area for India's strategies for development, is a strategic and background obstacle for the formation of regional competitions, since not only have India and Pakistan been competing with each other for a long time, but due to the common interests that have emerged between China and Pakistan, Pakistan has become a key pillar in China's global strategies. China has especially counted on Pakistan's strategic partnership for economic, political, and global plans, such as China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the One Belt One Road. In this regard, China and India have started their common cooperation project focusing on the development of Gwadar port, which is a very strategic part of the strategic plan of China's String of Pearls. Scholars believe that the development of this port can not only accelerate the dynamics of international policies in Asia, but it can also become the basis for the mutual dependence and tightening of China and Pakistan (Kaura, 2015).

Extensive studies have been conducted by researchers in various fields regarding the relations between India and Iran, exploring a

variety of topics in relation to the position of India and Iran regarding the common strategies of these two countries in the West region (Wisely, 2016; Blank, 2003, p. 142). Certain researchers believe that in this process, factors such as the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in the same year, the tension in the relations between Iran and the United States, and the recent threats to the interests of India and Iran have played an important role in shaping and defining the interests of these countries and have caused the geopolitical competition in South and West Asia to be affected by the relations between India and Iran in various areas (Cohen, 2009; Webb, 2011, p. 253). In addition, certain researchers have discussed Iran's Islamic identity in relation with India, China, and Pakistan: they believe that the close relations between India and the United States of America regarding terrorism and nuclear technology and at the same time the geopolitical competition between China and India, as well as between India and Pakistan have caused Iran to be more cautious about its relations with these three countries. Although due to the global competition between China and the United States of America, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been convinced that close relation with China can provide the desired interests for the country (Alam, 2004; Fair, 2007; Naaz, 2001b; Tisheyar, 2011; Ramana, 2012).

Cohen (2009) believes that in the late 19th century, geopolitical knowledge was first introduced as a series of general geographical rules in the field of matters governing the fate of countries, and then evolved as a pragmatic discourse. This evolution had taken place during five stages, which include the competition for imperialist hegemony, the emergence of German geopolitics, the emergence of American geopolitics, the state-oriented geopolitics

of the Cold War era versus the globalist geopolitics, and the geopolitics of the post-Cold War era (Cohen, 2009, p. 16). Flint (2021, p. 16) believes that geopolitics, both beliefs and action, has a fundamental connection with the emergence of governments and nation-based governments. In this view, geopolitics creates an opportunity for governments to continuously exploit the element of geography to compete with other countries. It is worth mentioning that geopolitical knowledge focuses on the relationship between political power and geographical space (Fidelity, 2015). This issue, in turn, highlights the position and importance of another important concept called "competition", which has a special function in the knowledge of political geography and geopolitics.

Conceptually, competition means the attempt of two or more groups, nations, and countries to gain influence and dominance over a certain geographical area or in the world. This can happen in order to maintain dominance and authority or to challenge the power of other actors, or it can be the result of the conflicts that are created as a result of trying to access the spatial resources (material and spiritual) (Ahmadi, Hafeznia, Badiee Azondahi, & Heidari Mosello, 1397 [2018 A.D.], p. 202). The focus area and the origin of competition can be related to territory, nationalism, lack of resources, and desire to achieve power or provide economic interests. These competitions, in turn, can lead to the emergence of various alliances and coalitions in both regional and global dimensions. The formation of these alliances in terms of geography is due to the fact that a number of powers seek to increase their acquired interests compared to their competitors, which they do by aligning their geopolitical strategies in a geographical area.

Another important concept to discuss is "region". To give a proper definition for the concept of region, a diverse range of

geographical, geopolitical, and political factors may be used. From a realistic point of view, the region is the subset of geographical space on the Earth and is structurally or functionally homogenous. It is also distinct from its neighboring regions based on structural or functional characteristics. A region can be basically arid, basically wet, or the integration of these two and it can encompass a lake or a peninsula on a small scale or the ocean and continent on a large scale (Hafeznia, 1389 [2010 A.D.], p. 1).

Regarding the nature of the formation of geopolitical relationships and competitions, certain researchers believe that one of the determinants is the countries' attitude towards the threat they perceive. In this case, they argue that the main cause of Pakistan and China's tendency towards each other can be sought in the perception of threats that they feel from India (Burgess, 2015). China provides economic, political, and strategic support for Pakistan against India's threats. This, in turn, has raised concerns for India, because China's support for Pakistan has paved the way for the change in the balance of powers between the two neighbors and established China's strategic superiority over India regarding its access to Central Asian areas. In order to regain its balance in this geographical area, India needs to facilitate its access to Central Asia and Europe by developing economic-political and even security cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and ultimately it can gain superiority over these two major and old competitors in this geographical region. Currently, besides Gwadar port, China's investment in Central Asian countries and the Karakoram Highway project have caused the country to surpass its traditional competitor, India Vis-à-vis its access to Central Asia.

Regarding geopolitical competitions in South Asia, researchers have emphasized that the nature of these competitions will be

visible only within the framework of the long-term perception of India-Pakistan and China-India competitions (Afridi & Bajoria, 2010; Roy 2015; 2016; Chaudhury, 2016; Kiran, 2012). On the other hand, another group of researchers believes that China's tendency towards expanding its relations with Pakistan indicates that China has a different view about the region (Lakshman, 2010), and within that framework, it tries to create a balance of power between India and Pakistan (Rajan, 2007, p. 147).

From the point of view of Pakistan's national interests, however, the strategies that this country has taken in order to have a close relationship with China are to meet its national goals. In fact, Pakistan considers China as a power against India and thus exploiting the interests that China has in Pakistan as a defensive power against India's possible threats to Pakistan (Bukhari & Parveen, 2014; Javaid & Jahangir, 2015). In other words, from Pakistan's point of view, India's military and economic power in the region is moderated by China's influence in the west of the Indian Ocean and Sea of Oman. The same attitude can be applied to India at the same time. Considering the geopolitical advantages that Pakistan and China have gained through cooperation with each other, India needs to create a balance of power with China and Pakistan in two areas:

1. Balance of power in the geopolitics of access
2. Balance of power in the geostrategic field

In order to create a balance of power in the geopolitical access and considering the conflicting interests of these three countries in Central Asia, India will have no other option but to have a close relationship with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Through the strategic position of Iran, India will have the opportunity to have access to Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Eurasia, and in this way,

prevent the change of power balance in the geopolitics of access in the West Asian region in favor of China and Pakistan. On the other hand, due to the strategic importance of India and China's competition in world politics, India is seeking the leverage and the military, economic, and technological power of America to create a balance of power against China. According to some researchers, this growing competition in the Indian subcontinent, which has created regional players such as Iran and global powers such as the United States and China, can be the forerunner of a rivalry between India and Pakistan. The new cold war in the region has emerged due to the competition for energy, access, and trade in Eurasia.

Various studies have thus far been conducted on the role of global players in the China-Pakistan competitions against India. However, evidence indicates that very few of these studies have investigated the role of Iran in these competitions (Joshi, 1010; Roy, 2016). Considering that Iran's role in these geopolitical competitions is rather significant due to Iran's position and its access to Eurasia, in this research, an attempt will be made to analyze the geopolitical functions of Iran's Chabahar port against Pakistan's Gwadar; these analyses are done in order to have a geographical-geopolitical view regarding Iran's role in the competition between India and the other two countries; Pakistan and China.

3. Research Method

The nature and topic of this research made the authors use the meta-analytic approach. A meta-analytic study is a study design employed to assess the results of previous research to draw conclusions about that body of research. Typically, this research

design is based on randomly collected data. In this framework, authentic documents in books, scientific-research articles, reliable internet websites and important international news agencies have been used to collect the data required for the research.

4. Research Findings

From the time of India's independence until now, the changing international environment and geopolitical structures have widely influenced the relations between India and its neighbors, as well as other countries in the world, in a way that many experts in the field of the geopolitics of the Indian sub-continent have emphasized that geopolitical dynamics and economic changes have played a decisive role in this area (Fair, 2010; Ganguly, 2010). India's geopolitics experts believe that this country has designed its foreign policy based on three concentric rings, which include the country's geopolitical and geoeconomic priorities (Figure 1):

1. Adjacent neighbors (inner ring)
2. Non-adjacent neighbors (middle ring)
3. Global domain (outer ring).

Therefore, due to Iran's historical, civilizational and cultural relations, as well as its strategic position, it is placed in the middle ring within India's foreign policy design, which, of course, is of great importance for India's foreign policy in the 21st century (Sathasivam, 2005, p. 14).

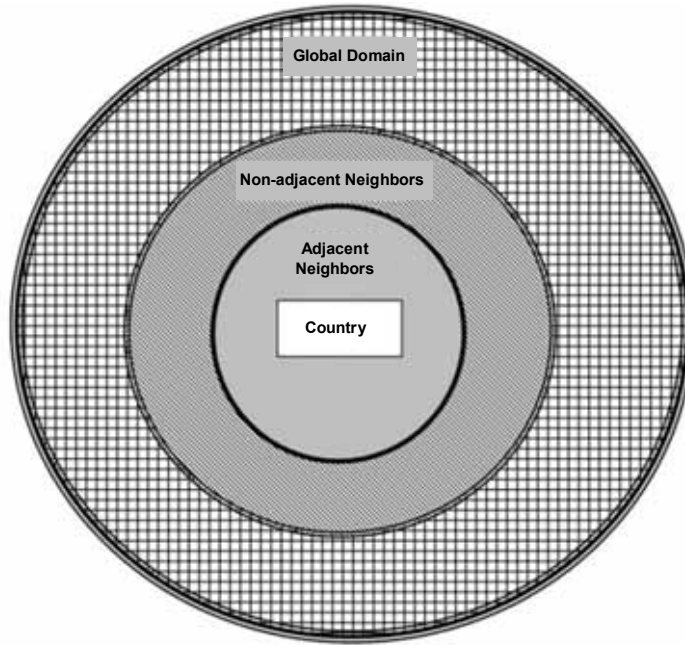


Figure 1. Kautilya's Attitude to the Geographical Environment around India

Source: Authors

Certain researchers believe that the origin of the geographical foundations of India's foreign policy can be historically traced to the theory of the Mandala, which was designed and presented by Kautilya in the fourth century BC. Kautilya was one of the thinkers and politicians in India's Gupta dynasty; based on the writings of Arthashastra, he is considered a forerunner in the political science of India, being in certain ways equal to Machiavelli from the academic point of view. According to Mandala's concept, presented by Kautilya, three concentric rings are designed, and these rings are organized by the geopolitical foundations of this theory. The center of these rings is called Vijigshu or king/country, whose first neighbor is most likely an Ari or a demonic enemy. The countries that are on the opposite side of Ari, take the position of Mitra

Vijigshu (ally) or the enemy of Vijigshu's enemy in Mandala theory. Next to the country of Mitra or the ally, there is probably another country, which is referred to as Ari Mitra (or the ally of the country's enemy). The country on the other side of Vijigshu is known as Parshingrah, which is the ally of Ari on the opposite side. Their common enmity with Vijigshu has led them to believe that an alliance can serve their interests. In his research, published in 1964, Modelski argues that in addition to these countries, there are two groups of non-aligned countries, which play a role in Kautilya's Mandala theory and India's historical foreign policy. These two groups of countries are known as Madhayama and Udasina. Madhayama is a country that is adjacent to Vijigshu and Ari; it is stronger than both of them and has the ability to destroy either Vijigshu or Ari in case of conflict. On the opposite side is Udasina, a neutral king or country, which is at the same time more powerful than Vijigshu, Arya and Madhayama (Modelski, 1964, p. 554).

According to Modelski (1964, p. 554), Kautilya's Mandala theory can be considered as the essence of the concept of international society, which emphasizes that a country should never trust any of its neighbors. At the same time, it points out that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. In the research that has been done recently by some researchers, there has been an attempt to explain the Mandala theory based on the contemporary geopolitical realities of India. In this way, Russia, Central Asia, and Iran are classified as the best friends of India, while China, and Pakistan are regarded as the main competitors of this country (George, 1992, p. 23). Other recent studies have supported George's point of view and emphasized that Russia can be the most important ally of India and in the meantime, Iran will play a vital role in granting India's access to Eurasia. Furthermore, China and Pakistan can be considered as the country's historical enemies (Devotta, 2010, p. 32).

4.1. Eurasia is the Focus of India's Foreign Policy

Since Mackinder proposed the theory of the heartland, the Eurasian region has become one of the main topics among researchers of history, political science, political geography, international relations, and regional studies in different historical periods. Zybginio Brzezinski (1998, p. 41) believes that due to the geopolitical importance of Eurasia for the world powers, the concept of Eurasianism has become one of the main concepts in political discussions. The importance of this concept and its functions in the growth and power of the countries that have interests in the Eurasian region is extensive to the point that this region has been converted into a playground for geopolitical competitions among the main global players. According to Brzezinski, Germany, France, Russia, China, and India have extensive strategic interests in this region since they regard the superiority of any actor in this region a threat to their interests. In this process, it should be noted that the countries of the Republic of Azerbaijan, South Korea, Turkey, Ukraine, and Iran are highly influential for the players due to the fact that they help Rimland gain access to Heartland and vice versa, and as a result, these geographical areas have been turned into a major center for global geopolitical competitions. In this framework, due to the fact that Iran is on the path of India's Eurasian, it tries to have an influence on Iran, gain access to Chabahar port, exploit this port as a gateway to gain influence in the Eurasian region, and as result gain a geopolitical advantage against its two major regional rivals, China and Pakistan, and geostrategically gain power and influence in the Eurasian region, exploiting this influence and access to gain superiority in global competitions (Mohanty, 2015).

Due to its strategic and economic relations with the European

Union, India needs a fast and safe access route. However, in recent years, due to the increasing proximity of China and Pakistan, a part of India's access to Europe and Eurasia has been threatened, and this problem has forced India to establish strategic relations with Iran in order to utilize the geopolitical access provided by Iran as a strategic tool for this country (Ahmad, 2010, p. 145).

Pakistan has recently caused significant challenges to both India and Iran. The issue of Pakistan's close relationship with the Taliban and the export of insecurity from this country to the eastern borders of Iran has caused Iran to have concerns about the country, while trying to maintain friendly relations with it (Yazdani, 2007, p. 356). At the same time, geopolitical rivalries and historical and religious differences between India and Pakistan have forced India to be aware of Pakistan's role in limiting the country's national interests. This issue can be a common point in the relations between Iran and India. However, it should not be forgotten that Pakistan's strategical friend, China, is at the top of Iran's major trade partners, and Iran has major interests in establishing relations with China through the economic and political relations that it has established with China. This issue has been one of the limiting factors in India-Iran relations, and there is a possibility that by making a 25-year strategic agreement between Iran and China, India will consider itself under the threat of China in Iran.

These cases indicate that India can only use Iran to gain access to the Eurasian region, but the growing economic power of China, which has enabled this country to exercise economic and political influence in Iran, is slowly becoming a major strategic obstacle against India's plans to influence this region, since Iran's tendency towards establishing a strategic relationship with China may in the future block India's access to the Iranian plateau region, and in this

way, India will face major geopolitical restrictions in terms of gaining access to the Eurasian region through Iran (Pant, 2008, p. 125). Nevertheless, it should be remembered that due to the extensive sanctions with which Iran has been dealing in the recent decades, the country's economy has become increasingly dependent on the import of goods and services from China and India. In fact, Iran is dependent on these two countries to meet a significant part of its domestic needs in various fields. In other words, maintaining friendly relations with both China and India is of strategic importance for Iran, and Iran seeks to use these two countries' geopolitical and geo-economic capabilities and advantages to improve its power to confront the United States of America. In addition, it seems that Iran, being aware of the growing competition between India and China, is trying to simultaneously utilize both of these countries to gain benefits, and in this way, the competition between China and India can be used to achieve new geopolitical and geo-economic advantages (Pant, 2008).

Therefore, it seems that in the geopolitical issue of access to Eurasia, Iran is trying to use its unique geographical position as a tool vis-a-vis both China and India, and to turn that into a factor that promotes national interests. In this process, while Iran is signing and implementing a 25-year strategic agreement with China, India can take these new and unique opportunities to invest in the southern ports of this country and use these communication infrastructures to gain access to the region of Central Asia, Russia, and Europe. The culmination of this effort on behalf of Iran can be seen in the Tehran Statement signed between India and Iran in 2001, as well as in the contract signed to develop and operate Chabahar port in 2003, which provided this unique opportunity for India to create common interests for both countries by investing in Iran's development infrastructure in the southern coast of Iran in

the Sea of Oman (Fair, 2010, p. 135). The latest statistics published by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry indicate that India's total trade with Iran in the 8 last months of 2022 has reached one billion and 791 million dollars. Trade exchanges between Iran and India have grown by 52% compared to the same period last year. The total commercial exchange of the two countries in the 8 months of 2021 was announced to be 1 billion and 176 million dollars. This is despite the fact that trade exchanges between Iran and China have reached 12 billion and 320 million dollars in the first 9 months of this year. Between January and September 2022, the exchanges between Iran and China have grown by 18%, compared to the same period last year.

Despite having a significant amount of time since the signing of these contracts, India could not use the right time and position in a proper way. In this period, due to the expansion of sanctions against Iran, as well as India's strategic and close relations with the United States of America, the Chabahar port development project progressed at a very low speed, in a way that many of its geopolitical observers and researchers considered that as a failed joint plan (Kharazmi, 2016). Iran's failure to use Indian funds for the development of its economic infrastructure and at the same time India's failure to take advantage of the opportunity that was provided for this country to have a connection with Eurasia through Iran changed into a good opportunity for China to become the top geo-economic player in Iran. Finally, this opportunity, on the one hand, enabled China to develop the Gwadar port in Pakistan with more freedom, and to complete the String of Pearls strategic plan; Considering the departure of the alternative player (India) from the geopolitical game of access in Iran, China persuaded Iran to deal with the country's demands to gain economic superiority in Iran. The final outcome of these geo-economic events for India has led

to the issue of reducing effective and fast access to the Eurasian region, which has made this country worry that in the absence of the competition formed in Iran, it will be surrounded by its main competitor, China in the future, as China has gained extensive control over access routes to the Eurasian region. In other words, this issue can change into a very important factor, which can threaten India's national interests and in the long run, lead to China's geopolitical superiority (Chaudhury, 2016a).



Figure 2. Iran's Facilitating Route to Gain Access to Eurasia and Central Asia
Source: CSIC, 2020

The two countries Pakistan and China have been major strategic and military partners since 1962, and Pakistan has acquired a major part of its missile and nuclear power with China's technical and scientific assistance. China's main approach in the last 5 decades has been to strengthen Pakistan's defense power to use this country as a strategic alliance to confront India and in this way to force India to extend its military strength in both eastern and western borders. At the same time, Pakistan has considered an alliance with China not as a follow-up to China's strategies, but as a way of using China's economic, political, military and security capabilities to strengthen its geopolitical position in the region (Small, 2015, p. 28). Moreover, in Kashmir crisis, Pakistan has counted on China's logistical and spiritual support more than any other country, while India has not officially been able to get the support of another country regarding this territorial dispute. Considering these cases, as well as the interests that Pakistan receives from economic and political cooperation with China, we should pay attention to the fact that China's investments in Pakistan strengthens China's global position as much as Pakistan's geopolitical strength. In addition, it should be noted that China's strategic need for Pakistan is much greater than Pakistan's need for China, since in the absence of Pakistan, it seems rather unlikely that China will be able to complete the Strings of Pearls project. Therefore, we can say that China's influence on Pakistan's coasts, along with the common financial and security interests that it bears for both countries, will strengthen Pakistan's economic and political deterrence power in the long term, and this country will have the opportunity to gain strategic superiority over India and become a geo-economic leader in the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea (Lakshman, 2010, p. 28).

India had a suitable opportunity to compensate for this process, which upsets the balance of power between this country, Pakistan,

and China, which consisted on increasing its geo-economic power by investing in Iran while gaining access to Eurasia. At the same time, due to the competition between Iran and Pakistan regarding maritime geopolitics, Iran had paid attention to direct cooperation with India as a chance to create a balance of power. However, with the expansion of the sanctions by the United States of America and India's reluctance to ignore these sanctions, on the one hand, India lost the opportunity to influence the Sea of Oman, and on the other hand, Iran was deprived of foreign investment. In this process, although the maritime cooperation between Iran and China has always been under the influence of the strategic position of Gwadar port and not having a similar advantage for Iran compared to Pakistan strategically, Iran was pushed towards cooperation with China. This expansion of cooperation may have maximum benefits for China because of the following reasons:

1. China seizes the opportunity to prevent India's influence on this region and prevent India's easy access to Eurasia. This will provide maximum benefits for China in terms of geo-economics and geo-politics.
2. Through the decreasing level of India's influence on this region, the possibility of threatening China's interests in the Strings of Pearls, which relies more than anything else on the presence of Pakistan, will be significantly reduced.

The threats that India feels from China and Pakistan are based on India's historical perception of threats, in such a way that the geopolitical and geoeconomic processes that India is currently experiencing can be rooted in the historical geopolitical representations that were previously presented by Kautilya about the nature of threats and international politics about India (Singh & Singh, 2019, p. 172). Now it seems that under the influence of the

dynamics governing international politics, which has made China superior to India in the equations of West Asia, India's foreign policy about the geopolitics of access to Eurasia has been subjected to threats from China and this country needs to move towards joint cooperation with Iran as soon as possible to maintain its position in West Asia. India's historical attitude towards its neighbors, which is influenced by the constant feeling of threat from the country's eastern and western borders while being consistent with the global systems (Cohen, 2009), along with geopolitical developments of access will force India to engage in geo-economic and geo-political action in the West Asian region, focusing on the geographical location of Iran. Considering India's geo-economic and geo-political interests in terms of access to Eurasia and Europe, geo-political competition with China and Pakistan, Iran's unique geographical position, and this country's deterrent strategies to prevent China from gaining supremacy in the West Asian region, the following suggestions may be given for maintaining the national interests of India:

1. Trying to convince Iran to abandon the 25-year joint cooperation agreement with China (the least likely option in terms of success).
2. Attempting to revive the joint cooperation agreement with Iran and its revival (the most likely option in terms of success).

In general, according to India's foreign policy principles and geopolitical strategies, which are based on Kautilya's teachings, neglecting Iran's position and function for India's national interests can be costly in the long run and will place this country in geoeconomic and geopolitical processes in a subordinate position in comparison to China-Pakistan axis.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this research indicate that India's foreign policy, while being affected by the dynamics of the international political environment and geopolitical developments, is rather originated in the historical attitude towards the neighbors of this country. As explained by Kautilya approximately three thousand years ago under the influence of the events that took place around India, this country has always felt threatened by its neighbors from both the east and the west, which encouraged India to move towards strategic cooperation with distant neighbors (countries like Iran and Japan). On the other hand, India was trying to take advantage of Iran's concern regarding the development of Gwadar port and move towards strategic relations with Iran and use Iran's geographical location through Chabahar ocean port to access Eurasia. This issue will turn Iran into a geographical center for competition with China in the field of geopolitics and in this way prevent the success of China's maritime strategy and the country's superiority in South Asia. Nevertheless, the changes and dynamics of the world system, in which countries such as Russia and the United States of America are increasingly influencing international trends, have imposed new imperatives on India and in certain cases, India has been forced to make choices that are sometimes in conflict with the country's national interests. The issue of sanctions against Iran by the United States of America illustrates one of these examples. Even though India needed to take advantage of Iran's geographical location in terms of geopolitics and the goal of access to Eurasia, it was forced to withdraw from investing and playing a role in Iran in order to ensure the satisfaction of its strategic ally, the United States of America.

The findings of this research reveal that this matter ended up in

favor of the two traditional and historical rivals of this country and created an opportunity for China and Pakistan not only to ensure the completion of the Strings of Pearls but also, with the withdrawal of India from the arena of competition in Iran, there will be a possibility for China to increase the costs of India's access to Eurasia as much as desired. In the meantime, the Islamic Republic of Iran suffered from India's withdrawal due to its strategic interests in maintaining relations with China and India, and this issue has pushed this country to cooperate with China. It seems that the best option for India and Iran's future is India's return to investing in Iran because this issue will increase Tehran and New Delhi's bargaining powers vis-à-vis their rivals. At the same time, due to India's strategic need to access Eurasia this country will also have to take steps towards strategic cooperation with Iran in order to reduce China's influence in Iran and increase its geo-economic and geopolitical advantages. To examine this subject from a wider perspective, future studies can conduct interviews with experts in the field.

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